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HISTORICAL FRAGMENTS

VISIONS OF A WISCONSIN GOLD SEEKER

My neighbor, Mrs. Warren H. Smith, of Waukesha, has in her possession a letter written by her father, Alfred B. Hunt, when the gold fever gripped Wisconsin and lured thousands of her sturdy sons to the newly discovered Eldorado of California. Though posted at Rochester, it was written on a farm at Caldwell's Prairie in the Town of Waterford, Racine County, where Mr. Hunt had settled in an early day and where he was married in April, 1843, to Caroline E. Wood, the sixteen year old daughter of a pioneer of 1839. Since the letter is a contemporary witness of what was then going on in every community of American stock in southern Wisconsin, its publication will, no doubt, be of interest to the readers of our Magazine.

ROCHESTER, JANUARY 25th 1850.

Dear Friend Ward:

In answer to your kind and gentlemanly note by Mr. Van Aeman I can truly say it would be very agreeable for me to call on you at this time and except your hospitality for the time being—But it is very inconvenient for me to leave home just now having to perform sundry duties not included in the category of house wifery— I shall undoubtedly be in Town in the course of 2 or 3 weeks Caroline desires to call on you—and we are waiting for snow. I heartily concur in your idea of California and the pleasures and hardships we might enjoy in going there. I expect we should find it anything but a modern Railway—But for me anything would be desirable to this cursid inactivity and continual want—although a trip there is attended with many hardships and sore trials of the knees and stomach—yet—I think it not wholly devoid of pleasure. He that has an eye for the grand and terrible in nature—could not fail to imbibe new ideas of the duty in beholding those stupendous mountains, and the eternal solitude that reigns around their cloud capt summits. Pardon this digression—I mean not to moralise—but fancy will sometimes wander even when the mind is stearnly attracted to one particular object— Friend Ward you mentioned in yours how hard it would be for you to stay behind and see them all start off and leave you behind—now that is precisely my feelings. I could never reconcile that plan to my feelings. I think you better go with me. I have made a bargain to go with John McCane and we will gladly except one more companion—3 is sufficient for one party as we shall go with a very small waggon— You have one over to Masons. Just the thing and if you go you must keep it and if you dont go we will buy it of you. We shall go from here to Independance emty and put in our provisions there. We

can ride through to there and then fill up. McCane is going to Illinois soon to get 3 ponys or a span of mules. We want 3 ponys so if one should get lame or die we can still have a team. The load will not weigh over six hundred and we want a very light waggon. Now Friend Ward, use every exertion to get away—we cant make anything here and we will endeavor to get lining for our pockets out there and that would truly keep a fellow's temper warm if not his legs. You can go it for \$150 or \$170 and cannot you raise that—wheather you sell or not—I would gladly let you have money if I had it but I have none for myself yet—I hope to be able to raise it in season. McCane is just the sort of fellow to suit you he is a keen fellow and well used to traveling. Come Ward—you must go with me—and we will see if our days of deviltry are over yet. I will see you soon

Yours respectfully

A. B. HUNT

Sunday afternoon. I have opened this letter to fill in a few more lines just to keep my heart free from the devil's influences. My old friend Ward I cannot bair to go off and leave you behind. I know how you feel and I would sacrifice \$100 rather than you should not go. How delightful and soul inspiring it would be to us to go off there together and share the hardships and dangers eaquelly between us and how many objects in nature should we see to admire in that long journey through there. It seems to me that if ever a fellow kneeded a true and honest friend it would be in going through there and with a good rifle and a keg of Hot drops—you and I could manage to forget home for a season. If you think you can possibly manage to get off let me know as soon as possible we have not but 2 yet for our Company, therefore, there is just a birth for you. Daniel Wood wants it if he goes, he will know in a few weeks. He has sent to sell his 40 acres in Fondulack. He is confident he shall go. Use evry exertion to raise the money old boy and we will enter upon the Millinum now and no mistake. Ward write a line to me at evry oppertunity to send this way.

It may interest your readers to learn that the men named in the forepart of the letter did not accompany Hunt across the plains. Instead, he was joined by Daniel Wood, who made his fortune in California and never returned; and Orlando Holt, who was also successful and came back via Cape Horn. The last was the father of R. L. Holt, a member of the Society. But the dreams of Hunt were never realized and his family never saw him again, for he died en route and was buried near Green River. His was the fate of thousands of gold-seekers who perished from the hardships encountered on the way.

Nearly fifty years later Hunt's descendants were surprised to learn that a tourist had accidentally discovered his long for-

gotten grave in the wilderness. The September, 1898, number of *Recreation* contained a brief article by Mrs. Ira Dodge on the names of those hardy gold seekers which she found in southwestern Wyoming on the rock walls along the old California overland trail. She also discovered a few graves. About one of these she wrote:

"One grave is marked, and perhaps some reader may throw light on the subject. The headstone is the end-gate of a wagon and the lettering is plain and neat. It reads:

ALFRED B. HUNT [possibly Hunter], RACINE CO., WIS. DIED JULY 1, 1850. AGED 26 YEARS."

The call of the golden West and the fertile prairies beyond the Mississippi during the third quarter of the last century induced a large number of Wisconsin's pioneers or their immediate descendants to leave her borders, never to return. This exodus, together with the immense influx of immigration from northern and central Europe during this period, made a material change in the ethnic character of our population. It is to be hoped that our Society will some time give this subject due consideration.

J. H. A. LACHER

MORE RECOLLECTIONS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I read the "Personal Recollections of the Republican Convention of 1860," in the September number of the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, with much interest.

I was publishing a paper at Warren, Illinois at the time of that convention, and had a seat in the reporters' gallery. My seat was only a few feet from the platform occupied by Ellsworth's Zouaves, a military company in Zouave uniform commanded by Colonel E. E. Ellsworth, who had brought it to such a high standard of military precision that its reputation had extended throughout the United States. A half hour was given, shortly after the convention opened, for a display of their training. We can look back now and realize that this seems almost a prophecy of the part that company was soon to take in the preservation of the Union, when a year later Fort Sumter was fired upon and the young leader was one of the first to respond to Lincoln's